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ABSTRACT

In view of the literacy skills needed to participate effectively in an increasing complex society, this report discusses the importance of reading and reading development in families, and the effort that Head Start puts into promoting family literacy. The report claims that parents' literacy level can have a strong influence on parent child relationships and on children's attitudes toward acquiring literacy skills. It is believed that Head Start can play a significant role in improving family literacy because many exemplary and replicable practices are currently being demonstrated by Head Start grantees. The report discusses the reasons of why Head Start must address literacy, the issues involved in developing literacy programs, the advantages of including Head Start in such programs, the different steps and activities needed to promote family literacy, as well as strategies to heighten awareness and develop intergenerational literacy. A list of family literacy publications, literacy catalogs, information about literacy, and literacy organizations is included. (MOK)

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Promoting Family Literacy Through Head Start

DHHS Publication No. (ACF) 91-31266

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Introduction

The primary goal of Head Start is to promote the development of social competence in the young children it serves. To effectively meet this goal, Head Start has long recognized the importance of supporting parents' efforts to attain family self-sufficiency and to be their child's first and most important teacher. Today, adult illiteracy limits the economic self-sufficiency of many Head Start families; furthermore, an intergenerational cycle of illiteracy, low expectations, and frustration threatens the development of Head Start children. Head Start must respond by incorporating a family-centered approach to promoting the literacy development of the families it serves.

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Family literacy programs support parents in improving their adult literacy and help foster within each family a love of reading and learning which nurtures the literacy development of children. The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, in *First Teacher: A Family Literacy Handbook for Parents, Policy-makers, and Literacy Providers*, (1989) provides the following description of family literacy programs:

> **These programs operate on the stated or implicit belief that it is important for the parent or primary care-giver to place a high value on the acquisition of literacy skills and to take an active role in the child's education in order for that child to do his or her best in school. Further, the more literate that parent or care-giver becomes, the more effective he or she will be in performing the necessary at-home and school-related tasks that support the child's educational development...(T)hese programs reflect the belief that the role of the parent in the educational development of the child is critical – that parents are a child's first and most influential teachers. (pp. 2-3)**

Head Start should play a significant role in helping its families break the cycle of intergenerational illiteracy because:

- Literacy development, which begins in early childhood, is a critical aspect of social competence;
- The adult literacy skills of Head Start parents significantly affect the self-sufficiency of their families;
- Local, State, and national attempts to promote family literacy need partners like Head Start to effectively reach low-income families with young children.

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The goals of Head Start's Family Literacy Initiative are:

- To enable Head Start parents to develop and use literacy skills which enable them to become more active and effective participants in the community, in the workplace, in their child's education and development, and in their efforts to obtain economic and social self-sufficiency;
- To enhance children's literacy development by helping parents become more effective as their child's "first teachers".

Many Head Start programs actively promote family literacy through a variety of new and standard practices. The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) and the Head Start Bureau encourage every Head Start program to make family literacy efforts part of its program. Over the next two years, the Head Start Bureau is implementing a Family Literacy Initiative which will provide information and demonstration support to Head Start grantees. This initiative will strive to meet the target set by Dr. Wade F. Horn, Commissioner of ACYF, that every Head Start grantee will, by 1992, have a literacy program in place for its families. The Literacy Initiative will focus on providing families with access to literacy materials, supporting parents as teachers and supporting parents as adult learners.

Subsequent pages of this document provide the following:

- **An overview of the problem of intergenerational illiteracy;**
- **A rationale for Head Start involvement in promoting family literacy;**
- **Suggestions for incorporating family literacy promotion into basic Head Start functions;**
- **Descriptions of existing Head Start family literacy efforts; and**
- **Information on resources which Head Start programs can use.**

Intergenerational Literacy

Overview

Over the last decade, general awareness of the status of adult literacy in the United States has increased. Though few Americans are completely illiterate, many have literacy skills below the level needed to effectively participate in an increasingly complex society. This group, often described as "functionally illiterate", is estimated to include over 23 million adults.

Illiteracy is both a cause and symptom of a myriad of social and economic problems. Inability to read can profoundly limit opportunities. Unemployment and poverty are often the consequences of these limitations. For a low-income parent of young children, adult educational needs often lose priority as the family struggles to meet basic survival needs. Helping low-income families with young children to address literacy needs will require a comprehensive and supportive approach.

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. Used with permission. Photo by Rick Reinhard.

The following are important dimensions of intergenerational literacy:

- Literacy skill levels which were adequate in a manufacturing and agricultural economy are insufficient today. American employers are becoming acutely aware of a widening "skills gap" between the literacy demands of today's jobs and the actual skills of current and incoming employees.
- The large number of students who leave school prior to high school graduation contributes to the national problem of functional illiteracy. This problem is most acute in urban, low-income areas and among Hispanic youths.
- There is a rapidly increasing number of adults in the United States for whom English is a second language. Their literacy skills may be limited due to low English language proficiency or, for some, limited education in their native countries. In order to meet their special needs, literacy programs must include basic English language instruction.
- The concept of functional illiteracy is most often discussed in the context of workplace demands. However, adults who are parents need literacy skills to meet the health, nutrition, safety, and educational needs of their children. A parent with low literacy skills may be unable to read or respond to printed notices from a child's school or be unable to follow the instructions on a child's medication.

- Many parents with low-literacy skills experienced such frustration and failure as children that as adults they avoid literacy-related activities. These parents often communicate their negative attitudes toward literacy and schooling to their children, and thus perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of illiteracy.

Head Start and Intergenerational Literacy

Head Start must address family literacy as part of its efforts to support parents as the first teachers of their children and promote the self-sufficiency of Head Start parents. Data from the 1987-88 Head Start Program Information Report (P.I.R.) indicate that 49% of the primary care-givers for Head Start children have attained less than a high school diploma or G.E.D. While we do not know the level of functional literacy skills which these parents possess, observations by Head Start programs addressing adult literacy suggest a wide range of needs; many parents have skills which are too low to permit immediate success in a G.E.D. training program (which most often requires at least sixth grade level reading skills). In addition, many parents who have attained a high school diploma may still have significant literacy skill needs.

Five Reasons Why Head Start Must Address Family Literacy:

1. **The values which young children bring to the activity of reading are established prior to their entry into elementary school, and parents are the most important influence upon these values.**
2. **The best predictor of a child's educational success is the parents' educational attainment.**
3. **Parents who have developed a sense of efficacy are best able to nurture their child's development of social competence.**
4. **Improving the quality of life for their child is a strong motivator for parents to accept the challenge of addressing their own literacy needs.**
5. **Functional literacy skills do not guarantee economic self- sufficiency or full participation in one's community; however, without these skills, such accomplishments are nearly impossible.**

All Head Start children enjoy opportunities to share stories and books in the Head Start classroom, but this experience will not be enough. Too many Head Start children do not have the pleasure of listening to stories read or told by a family member; they may seldom see their parents use reading or writing skills to solve everyday problems. Often there are few or no reading materials for children or adults in their homes.

Head Start parents must personally demonstrate to their young children that they believe reading is valuable. They must model the everyday use of reading as a way to "find out about things" and writing as a way to "tell about things". Parents with the most basic levels of literacy skills can, with support and direction, play a very significant role in establishing their children's values about literacy. They can also help make their own dreams for their children's educational future become a reality.

Benefits to the Head Start Child and Family

"The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children." (Becoming a Nation of Readers, 1983).

Children's early school success in reading is significantly affected by their experiences listening to, and retelling, stories read or told to them by an adult. Learning to read is an active and creative process; the rudimentary skills of reading are emerging in children long before they begin formal instruction in how to recognize or spell words. These emerging literacy skills include the young child's recognition of actions portrayed in pictures and the understanding that the story read aloud to them corresponds to words printed upon a page.

Young children's early experiences with oral stories and print materials nurture a child's effort and curiosity in acquiring that remarkable human skill of deriving and imparting meaning through the printed word. Elementary school reading instruction often presumes that entering students have had substantial early experiences in activities which reinforce their emergent literacy skills. Unfortunately, many Head Start children do not share the experience of many middle-class students; i.e., from 500 to 1,000 hours of hearing stories told or read to them before they begin formal reading instruction in the first grade.

For many parents the desire to promote their child's literacy development can spur an interest in improving their own literacy. The potential of Head Start to serve as a catalyst for parents to address their adult learning needs should not be underestimated. When Head Start can enable a parent to identify his or her own literacy needs and support that parent's participation in adult education opportunities, the benefits extend to the children and will last well beyond the period of Head Start enrollment.

Photo: Head Start Bureau

The Head Start Model and Family Literacy

Head Start and family literacy models share the belief that the parent is a child's first and most important teacher. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn how well many standard Head Start practices can be adapted to promote family literacy. Such Head Start practices as the family needs assessment and the community needs assessment processes, developmentally appropriate educational programming for children, parent involvement, parent training, and the utilization of volunteers are existing mechanisms for promoting family literacy.

The Head Start Family Literacy Initiative calls upon every Head Start grantee to recognize family literacy as a priority which is clearly reflected in the regular activities of their Head Start programs. For example, in conducting the family needs assessment, the observed and expressed needs of family members for literacy development should routinely be noted. Then support should be offered to the family in defining and addressing individual goals. The educational programming for classroom and home should reflect a commitment to promoting children's emerging literacy, and should actively involve parents as models. The Head Start Family Literacy Initiative does not call for the creation of a distinct literacy component in the Head Start program; instead, it encourages improving the capacity of existing Head Start practices to promote family literacy.

The Nation Needs Head Start as a Partner for Family Literacy

In order to successfully address America's literacy needs, community based programs like Head Start must play an active role in the solution. With its reputation for credibility in the communities it serves, Head Start can effectively recruit, support, and *retain* adult learners who may not be reached by existing literacy programs. The advantages of including Head Start in a community's efforts to promote literacy include:

- Head Start has a community identity as a family-focused program with operating principles of parent involvement and empowerment.
- Head Start has a capacity for sustained contact with parents through the child's regular program attendance and parent involvement activities.
- Head Start is committed to working with families, focusing upon their strengths and devising creative strategies to meet their needs.
- Head Start's holistic approach to child development enables parents to develop their roles as advocates, nurturers, and teachers of their children.

In too many Head Start families, young children may have little experience of literacy-related activities as fun, interesting, or valued by their parents. Possible reasons for this include:

- Some parents do not recognize that they play a critical role in their child's literacy development; they need to discover how they can support this development.
- Some families do not have, or do not take advantage of, access to materials and activities that promote family literacy.
- For some parents, their own low levels of literacy prevent or discourage them from sharing literacy-based activities with their children.

Three basic roles for Head Start's Promotion of Family Literacy:

1. **Increasing the Head Start families' access to materials, activities, and services which are essential to family literacy development (e.g., acquiring children's books for the home, helping every family to get and use a library card, and promoting family participation in a story hour for young children at a neighborhood center);**
2. **Supporting parents in the role of being their child's first teacher by providing the encouragement and specific direction to Head Start families which will stimulate and sustain the child's interest and the child's potential for future independent success in literacy activities; and**
3. **Assisting parents as adult learners to recognize and address their own literacy needs by creating an environment which is positive, supportive, and contains the promise of benefiting both them and their children.**

There are several basic activities which any Head Start program can provide to foster family literacy. Other functions will require setting priorities, considering the needs and resources of the community served. Collaborations with existing literacy promoting programs (e.g., libraries, adult basic education agencies, English as a Second Language and literacy volunteer programs) are important. These programs have resources and skills which Head Start should complement rather than duplicate.

First Steps In Promoting Family Literacy

Getting Started

It is important to develop a specific plan to promote family literacy. To begin the plan, take an inventory of the Head Start program by area of major activity. This a good way to examine the existing practices which foster family literacy development or could be modified to do so. A format for the inventory is presented on page 11. After conducting the inventory, review identified needs with staff and parents and agree upon priorities. Next, describe specific, reasonable, and measurable short-term objectives and assign a person to be responsible for each objective. Then, describe a strategy and the scope of effort needed to accomplish the objectives. Finally, determine what resources both within and outside Head Start can support the effort. Two categories of resources should be seriously considered: partnerships with existing community literacy programs and partnerships with volunteers. See Table 1 on page 10 for a discussion of the steps involved.

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. Used with permission. Photo by Rick Reinhard.

Community Partnerships to Address Family Literacy

Some of the most innovative and potentially effective strategies to build Head Start family literacy have resulted from collaborations with existing community organizations. Public and private organizations, from volunteer groups to private industry, are increasingly focusing upon family literacy development as a means of interrupting the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy. A Head Start program's family literacy activities should be shaped by the needs and resources of the community that it serves.

The Head Start program should not expect to act in isolation when addressing the literacy needs of its families. Potential collaborators in literacy efforts include libraries, businesses, civic organizations, and literacy volunteer programs. Public education programs should also be approached. These include: adult basic education, General Education Development (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL), and the new Even Start demonstration projects. Head Start has an important role to play in these efforts as a comprehensive family-centered approach that is known and trusted in the communities it serves. Head Start can help an existing literacy program

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to "connect" with families which might otherwise be overlooked or ineffectively served by existing approaches. Refer to Table 2 on page 14 for suggestions about collaborating with local family literacy resources.

TABLE 1

Action Plan for Getting Started In Family Literacy

1. TAKE INVENTORY

Take an inventory of existing projects and practices in your Head Start center. Which practices promote family literacy development? Which might complement a family literacy initiative underway in the community? What resources are available to further these efforts? (Use the Inventory provided as Page 11)

2. SET PRIORITIES

Review the needs of the surrounding community and Head Start parents and families. Include parents and staff in the discussion. Set priorities. Determine whether these needs can be addressed over the short term or will require long term projects.

3. SET OBJECTIVES/GOALS

After needs and resources are determined, define the goals and objectives of this initiative. What should be accomplished through this effort? What specific benefits will families derive from the project?

4. DEVELOP STRATEGIES

Design strategies to further establish goals and objectives. Decide how to incorporate the literacy initiative into everyday program activities, in the classroom, home visits, family needs assessment, social services, etc. How can new literacy efforts become a long-lasting feature of the program? What community organizations offer literacy services the families need and how can Head Start help these services become more effective for Head Start families?

An Inventory of Head Start Program Practices Which Promote Family Literacy

Major Activity Area	How Family Literacy Is Promoted In This Area	
	Currently	Next Steps
Community Resource Directory		
Early Childhood Curriculum		
Family Needs Assessment		
Home Visits		
Parent Involvement		
Staff Training		
Volunteers		
Policy Council		

In planning family literacy efforts the Head Start program should:

- **Review existing community family literacy programs to learn what services they offer, whom they serve, and how Head Start families could benefit from their program;**
- **Convene an advisory panel of representatives from local literacy programs to meet with Head Start staff and parents to help Head Start promote family literacy; and**
- **Send representatives from Head Start to join local advisory boards or committees that address literacy issues in the community. This will enable the Head Start program to be involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of literacy services to Head Start families.**

Since the availability of resources will significantly affect the level of activity which the Head Start program can implement, a review of community family literacy resources should be conducted. To best determine the form that partnerships with local family literacy resources will take, it is essential to establish personal contact with representatives of relevant agencies. It may be more efficient and more effective to invite representatives from local literacy promoting programs to meet with Head Start parents and staff to plan collaboration. The Head Start program should join existing community literacy planning committees and use this forum to insure inclusion of Head Start in planned services. It can be very valuable to invite potential partners to visit the Head Start center, see it in action, and acquire a broader sense of Head Start's mission. Without this exposure, these partners may be limited by a perception of Head Start as solely a preschool program. After the Head Start program and the community literacy program more fully understand what each party can offer, planning for collaboration will be more effective.

Volunteers as Family Literacy Resources

Volunteers have always played an important role in Head Start programs and should play a key role in any literacy initiative. Volunteers can increase the impact of a literacy effort, serving as tutors, storytellers/readers, by collecting and distributing reading materials, and by offering encouragement and support to help program participants to meet their literacy goals.

In an address to the 1990 Head Start Volunteer and Community Partnership Institute, Ms. Billie Ann Myers, Volunteer Coordinator for the State of Arkansas, addressed the four essential features of a successful volunteer effort:

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1. **The commitment of the program's Board of Directors and the executive staff.**
2. **One person with clear responsibility for administering the volunteer program.**
3. **Volunteers must endorse the principles which guide the program; this requires comprehensive orientation to the program's mission.**
4. **The volunteer program must be well planned, implemented, and evaluated; volunteers must believe their donation of time is well spent.**

The Volunteer Coordinator's Handbook, distributed to Head Start grantees by the Head Start Bureau, is an excellent guide on beginning a volunteer program. In addition, Head Start programs can contact existing literacy/library volunteer programs in their community to learn how the programs can work together to bring their knowledge, experience, and resources to bear on Head Start's literacy efforts. Section IV of Appendix A provides a selected list of associations, organizations and government offices which address literacy; these organizations can provide information about their local affiliates.

TABLE 2

Interagency Collaboration at the Local Level

OBJECTIVE: To identify resources, establish contacts and actively collaborate to promote family literacy in Head Start.

Following are possible local level resources for Head Start programs to utilize in planning and implementing family literacy promotion efforts in each of the three focus areas:

ACCESS FOR FAMILIES:

- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF)
- Public and School Libraries
- Private Sources of Books to Own
- Stimulation Resources (Storytellers, Readers, Performing Artists)

PARENTS AS TEACHERS:

- Family Literacy Projects (Even Start, Library, University, Literacy Volunteers)
- Individuals and Organizations to Provide In-Service Education and Materials/Activity Guides
- Agricultural Extension Programs
- Community Youth Organizations, e.g. Girl Scouts of America
- Library Parent-Child Projects

PARENTS AS ADULT LEARNERS:

- Adult Basic Education/G.E.D. Programs
- Literacy Volunteer Organizations
- Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and Private Industry Council (PIC) Programs
- Welfare Reform/J.O.B.S. Program
- Community Literacy Councils
- Community Colleges/Universities
- English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs
- Library Adult Literacy Programs

Designing Activities To Promote Family Literacy

After determining needs, resources, strategies and goals, the next appropriate step is to design and implement activities to meet stated objectives. This section offers specific suggestions to Head Start programs for promoting family literacy with activities in each of the three focus areas.

Photo: Head Start Bureau

Family Literacy Focus Areas

1. **Family Access**

   Objective: To increase the Head Start family's access to materials, activities, and services which can promote family literacy development.

2. **Parents as Teachers**

   Objective: To support parents in their role as their child's first teacher. Providing direction and encouragement to Head Start families will stimulate and sustain a child's interest in literacy activities.

3. **Parents as Adult Learners**

   Objective: To support parents as adult learners and enable them to recognize and address their own literacy needs. Creating an environment which is positive and supportive will convince parents that literacy benefits them and their children.

Increasing Access to Family Literacy Opportunities

The Head Start program should be involved at the very basic level of increasing Head Start families' access to the materials, activities, and services which are the foundation for family literacy development. Many low-income homes lack reading materials which parents can share with their children. This need cannot be overlooked by a family literacy program. The National Center for Family Literacy underlines the findings of multiple studies of children's school success: "Parents who have books in the home and read to their children have children who are good readers and good students."

Encourage Head Start parents to use the public library. Regular visits will help cultivate a familiarity and comfort with library facilities. The library offers numerous educational opportunities such as story hours, reading clubs, etc.

Parents must acquire, and share with their children, stimulating children's books. Head Start can introduce and encourage ongoing use of book-lending resources such as the public library and/or a Head Start collection. It is also important for families to acquire reading materials that they and their children can keep as their own. Consult with the local library to identify community resources for low-cost or donated reading materials.

One resource which several Head Start programs have utilized to obtain low-cost, high quality children's books is Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. (RIF). A national non-profit organization, RIF supports community projects that encourage children to want to read. RIF believes that children who like to read, will read.

Each RIF project is sponsored by a local agency and staffed by community volunteers. Using the network provided by the national RIF, local projects order books from publishers at discount prices. They then give them away to young people at several "book distributions" throughout the year.

Presently there are Head Start-based RIF projects in 17 States. Many Head Start RIF projects report that RIF's name recognition improves community support for the fund-raising required for book purchases. (See Section IV of Appendix A to obtain information about enrolling in RIF.)

RIF Projects Enable Head Start Programs To:

- **Receive technical assistance on how to organize and operate a RIF reading motivation project (including fund-raising and volunteer recruitment);**
- **Secure substantial discounts on quality children's books; and**
- **Provide young children with books they may take home and keep as their own.**

Recently, several Head Start grantees have established a RIF project in their program with assistance from their local Kiwanis Club. Kiwanis is an international service organization which has established a service priority, through the year 1993, of addressing the needs of young children. Kiwanis International's "Young Children: Priority One" campaign has designated Head Start and Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. as two of the select group of service projects which their local affiliates are encouraged to support as part of their community service efforts. As a result of this campaign, several Head Start programs have become affiliates in RIF with support provided by the local Kiwanis club. This is an excellent example of community-based collaboration which is bringing high quality family literacy materials and training to Head Start programs and the families they serve. To learn more about how the Kiwanis' "Young Children: Priority One" project may help your program address family literacy please refer to Section III of Appendix A.

Head Start programs use many creative approaches to acquire reading materials for the children they serve. Several programs have solicited quality children's books and magazines from local bookstores, toy stores, or other stores carrying reading materials for children. One Head Start program described an arrangement with their local postmaster whereby they collect "undeliverable" second class and third class mailings of magazines, newspapers, and other popular and current reading materials from the post office and then distribute these to Head Start families in their literacy program. Other programs have acquired free reading materials from publishers with production or distribution sites in their communities.

Many Head Start programs report gathering and distributing used, high quality children's books in good condition. Volunteers have supported collection drives at local schools, churches, and workplaces. Books are then distributed at a Head Start Book Fair where children have a wide selection from which to choose.

Children are encouraged to treasure the books through such volunteer-supported activities as placing an attractive nameplate in each book and helping children to decorate a personalized "Book Box" where their new and favorite books can be showcased.

For many Head Start families, language and cultural differences may limit access to family literacy resources. An increasing number of Head Start children live in homes where the primary language is not English. These families may be discouraged from participating in programs which do not acknowledge and address this language barrier. Head Start programs should take into account the needs of this population by working with existing programs designed to meet this special need.

Recommendations for Promoting Family Literacy in a Multi-Cultural Society:

- Establish a partnership with each family in which their beliefs, aspirations, and concerns about literacy development for themselves and their children are explored. Demonstrate respect for the language and culture of each family, and build upon this foundation in all family literacy activities.
- Support parents' use of the language in which they are most fluent as a means of effectively stimulating their young children's interest in developmentally appropriate literacy activities.
- Beware of any approach which attempts to totally replace the language of the home with English. Such an approach may actually undermine communication between the parent and child, and reduce opportunities for the stimulation of the child's emerging literacy skills and interests.
- Recognize that some persons with limited English proficiency who seek adult literacy instruction may have limited literacy skills in their primary language. For these adults, a more appropriate immediate goal may be developing literacy skills in their primary language or improving comprehension and use of spoken English.

- Consider how language and cultural differences create barriers to some families' participation in literacy promotion activities. Work to remove these barriers and build bridges which invite participation by everyone. Consult with local programs experienced in serving particular cultural groups to increase your program's effectiveness in serving a multi-cultural population.

Supporting Parents as Teachers

Every Head Start program should emphasize the importance of family in a child's development of interest, competence, and pleasure in literacy activities. Literacy promotion is something every parent can do, regardless of their own level of literacy. However parents often need specific information and guidance on the best methods to promote their child's literacy development. Well-intentioned parents may attempt to promote their child's literacy with activities that are not developmentally appropriate for the child. For example, the parent who prematurely emphasizes alphabet recognition or phonics skills, despite the child's persistent frustration, may discourage that child's literacy development.

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. Used with permission. Photo by Rick Reinhard.

An inventory of a family's current literacy practices is needed to plan support services. Most families provide, or have access to, opportunities to stimulate literacy development. How often do children look at or read books? What about the parent? If the family watches television, what kinds of programs do they view frequently? What daily opportunities exist for the parent to engage the child in listening to stories or sharing books? These and other questions should be asked when developing support for parents as teachers.

Literacy promotion with Head Start children should not be exclusively classroom-based. Head Start parent education programs reinforce the value that active parent participation plays a part in a child's literacy development. Develop a strategy to transfer literacy promotion from teacher to parent and to maintain the parent's involvement. Such a strategy is integral to the effectiveness of any parent education effort.

For many Head Start programs, the home visit provides a good opportunity to demonstrate and support parent-child literacy interactions. Home visitors must establish literacy promotion as a priority, plan literacy activities which involve the parent and child for some portion of their visit, and take time to specifically demonstrate and reinforce parent practices which promote literacy.

The Head Start Family Literacy Initiative seeks to build a parent's confidence in reading to his or her child. Encouraging parents to read elementary level books to their children can reduce their negative connotations about an adult reading children's books. Furthermore, children often enjoy hearing an adult read a story aloud several times. This activity can contribute to the literacy development of both the parent and child. Any parent, despite his or her reading skills, can share literacy promoting activities, such as telling stories or sharing picture books. These activities can increase a child's success in becoming a reader. For parents with limited literacy skills, guidance and support from the Head Start program can enable them to undertake this role.

Supporting Head Start Parents as Adult Learners

Head Start serves a large number of adults who are in need of literacy skill improvement. A Head Start program can capitalize upon its personal, supportive, family-centered approach to help Head Start parents address their literacy needs. Head Start can also call upon a powerful motivator for the Head Start parent, the fact that parents who improve their own literacy skills are doing something which will significantly benefit their children. Because learning to read is a long-term process that shows few immediate gains, it is often difficult to enroll and retain adults in literacy programs.

Reports from Head Start grantees with adult literacy programs recommend that initiatives start small and grow, with the benefit of experience, into more comprehensive efforts. Successful programs report that their initial adult literacy efforts, often with only two or three adults with moderate levels of need, provided them with valuable information on the nuts and bolts of adult literacy service, e.g., volunteer training, curriculum, transportation and child care issues. In addition, putting an identifiable "program" into operation provides a concrete example to share with potential collaborators. This example will show the role that Head Start can play in a more comprehensive community literacy program. Collaboration can enable Head Start to acquire needed information about literacy instruction methods and materials, tutor training and support, and some of the incentives for participation which existing literacy and adult education/training programs can offer.

To effectively promote the involvement of Head Start parents in adult literacy programs, Head Start should be involved in efforts to provide, or to influence the provision of, features designed to sustain parent participation.

Features of Effective Adult Literacy Programs:

- **Use of a curriculum which is responsive to parent's needs, self-esteem, and interests (e.g., addresses their roles as parents, consumers, employees).**
- **Child care available during a parent's instruction.**
- **Transportation needs are addressed.**
- **An adult education program connected to job placement.**
- **A peer support system among adult learners.**
- **Supportive counseling, including goal setting.**
- **Supportive transitions from one program level to the next.**
- **Affirmation of parents' beliefs that their efforts will benefit both themselves and their children.**

A Head Start program's involvement in a community's adult literacy initiative can increase the positive impact of the literacy program on Head Start families by combining the literacy program's experience in literacy education with the Head Start program's expertise in working with low-income families. Roles for the Head Start program may include involvement in recruiting and supporting effective participation by Head Start parents and providing training to literacy volunteers on how to work more effectively with low-income families, some of whom may speak English as a second language.

Some parents who want to improve their literacy skills may be poorly prepared to begin work on their GED, or high school equivalency, certificate. For the most part, adults with English reading skills below a sixth grade level will find the GED program a frustrating experience.

Grantees should expect to find a wide range of literacy skills among Head Start parents. When assessing an individual's needs, keep in mind that an adult's educational attainment (last grade completed) often does not correspond to the adult's actual reading skill level. Many adults entering literacy programs have an immediate goal of obtaining a high school equivalency certificate. For a significant number of parents this will not be a reasonable short-term goal. Programs for adult learners should match their needs, values, and motivations to increase the likelihood that they will make meaningful progress.

Insights From Head Start Literacy Demonstration Projects

A group of Head Start grantees received Coordinated Discretionary Grant Program funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Development Services, for the period 1988 through 1990 to demonstrate effective approaches to promoting literacy in Head Start families. A brief description of each program was provided in the August 1989 edition of the Head Start Bulletin. These grantees met in 1989 and 1990. The observations and suggestions they made at those meetings are pertinent to any Head Start program addressing family literacy.

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. Used with permission. Photo by Rick Reinhard.

Observations and Suggestions From Head Start Grantees

- **Many parents report that they want to improve their own literacy level to benefit their children.**
- **Many of the parents who participated in the Head Start literacy program had previously dropped out of an existing adult basic education or literacy program.**
- **A personal supportive approach succeeded in recruiting participants.**
- **It is advisable to obtain an endorsement of the literacy program from current or former Head Start parents to help recruiting efforts.**
- **More parents than anticipated had very low literacy skills (i.e., skills below a fourth grade reading level).**
- **In order to sustain motivation, both immediate and long-term objectives should be established.**
- **It is important to address issues of the adult learner's self-esteem, trust of the literacy program providers, and motivation.**
- **Provide support services to enable consistent adult participation in a literacy program.**
- **Anticipate problems which can disrupt participation.**
- **Head Start must develop partnerships with community literacy programs to best serve Head Start families.**

Head Start programs currently providing family literacy activities recommend the following strategies to anyone interested in replicating their efforts:

- Heighten awareness about the importance of family literacy efforts to change attitudes of staff and families. Every family participating in Head Start should receive the message that literacy is important and that Head Start can help a family address its literacy needs;
- Emphasize that the program's efforts are intended to improve a parent's quality of life, employability, and success as a child's first teacher;
- Create a "print-rich" environment in Head Start classrooms, offices, parent meeting rooms, and public places to convey the importance assigned to literacy; and
- Establish a lending library of children's books, perhaps with accompanying audiotapes, so that stories introduced in the classroom may be shared again in the home.

Summary

This document has provided an overview of the problem of intergenerational illiteracy and its relevance to the Head Start program. It provides only an introductory guide to how Head Start programs can address family literacy. The needs and opportunities in family literacy will vary by community and the staff of each Head Start program will have to make practical judgements about the best approach to those needs. Whenever possible, the Head Start program approach should complement, rather than compete with, available literacy resources.

Many exemplary and replicable family literacy practices are currently being demonstrated by Head Start grantees. The challenge is to build upon and extend these practices throughout the Head Start program.

The Head Start Bureau recognizes the innovation and resourcefulness of its grantees and encourages grantees to share with each other, with the regional resource centers, and with their regional Federal offices information about their efforts to support family literacy. These joint efforts will firmly establish and increase Head Start's important role in promoting family literacy.

Appendix A
Selected Family Literacy Resources

I. Family Literacy Publications

- *Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write.* Edited by D.S. Strickland and L.M. Morrow. 1989. This book is available for $15.00 plus shipping from The International Reading Association. See catalogue listed in Section II below. (Item 351).

- *First Teachers: A Family Literacy Handbook for Parents, Policy Makers, and Literacy Providers.* 1989. Available for $4.00 (prepaid including postage and handling) from The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy listed in Section IV below.

- *Leadership for Literacy, The Agenda for the 1990's.* June 1990. Available for $24.95 from Jossey Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104.

- *Literacy Learning in the Early Years* by Linda Gibson. 1989. Available for $16.95 plus shipping from Teacher's College Press, P.O. Box 939, Wolfeboro, New Hampshire 03894. (800-356-0409 or 212-678-3919).

- *The New Read Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease. 1989, revised ed. Available for $9.95 from the International Reading Association. See catalogue listed in Section II below. (Item 637).

- *The RIF Guide to Encouraging Young Readers*, edited by R. Graves. 1987. Available for $9.95 plus shipping and handling from Reading Is Fundamental. See catalogue listed in Section II below.

- *Risk Makers, Risk Takers, Risk Breakers-Reducing the Risks for Young Literacy Learners.* 1989. Edited by JoBeth Allen and Jana M. Mason. Available for $18.50 plus shipping from Heinemann Educational Books, 70 Court Street, Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801. (603-431-7894)

- *Toward Defining Literacy*, edited by R. Venizky, D.A. Wagner, B. Ciliberti. 1990. Available for $6.75 plus shipping and handling from the International Reading Association. See catalogue listed in Section II below. (Item 533).

II. Literacy Catalogues

- The International Reading Association Catalogue. This is a free catalogue of publications on literacy for adults and children. For a copy, contact IRA Order Department, 800 Barksdale Road, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, Delaware 19714-8139. (302-731-1600)

- The Adult Literacy Resource Book. This free catalogue is distributed by the New Readers Press, the publishing division of Laubach Literacy International. To obtain a copy, contact the New Reader's Press, Special Catalogue Request Department, Box 131, Syracuse, New York 13210. (800-448-8878 or, for New York, 800-624- 6203).

- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) publishes a listing of books, booklets, parent guide brochures, posters and a workshop guide. To obtain a free copy of this listing contact: RIF Publications Department, 600 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20024-2520. (202-287-3220).

III. Information About Literacy

- A.L.L. Points, is a bi-monthly bulletin concerning adult learning and literacy. It contains descriptions of adult literacy programs and resources and describes new developments and publications in the field. To be placed on the mailing list, write to:

  The U.S. Department of Education
  Division of Adult Education and Literacy
  Office of Vocational and Adult Education
  Washington, D.C. 20202-72401

- The National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs Bulletin is issued monthly. It is available free of charge from Development Associates, Inc., 2924 Columbia Pike, Arlington, VA 22204. (703-979-0100).

- ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center). This is the world's largest education information system. It was established in 1966 and is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. Call toll free to learn details about the 16 ERIC Clearinghouses, to obtain a free catalogue of publications and to learn about other ERIC components (1-800-USE-ERIC).

Following are four ERIC clearinghouses which can supply information about literacy such as journal articles, local level resources and literacy publications:

1. **Adult, Career, and Vocational Education**
   Ohio State University
   1900 Kenny Road
   Columbus, OH 43210-1090
   Telephone: (614) 292-4353
   (800) 848-4815

2. **Elementary and Early Childhood Education**
   University of Illinois
   College of Education
   805 W. Pennsylvania Avenue
   Urbana, IL 61801-4897
   Telephone: (217) 333-1386

3. **Languages and Linguistics***
   Center for Applied Linguistics
   1118 22nd Street, NW
   Washington, DC 20037-0037
   Telephone: (202) 429-9551

*Includes Adjunct Clearinghouse on Literacy Education For Limited English Proficient Adults

4. **Reading and Communication Skills**
   Indiana University
   Smith Research Center, Suite 150
   2805 East 10th Street
   Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
   Telephone: (812) 855-5847

■ Kiwanis International Headquarters
Program Development Division
3636 Woodview Trace
Indianapolis, IN 46268
Telephone: (317) 875-8755
(800) 879-4769

As part of its 1990 to 1993 "Young Children: Priority One" campaign, the Kiwanis International, a community service organization, has specifically designated Head Start and Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. (RIF) as two service programs which local Kiwanis clubs are encouraged to support. In many communities the Kiwanis campaign has already brought Head

Start and RIF programs together, producing Kiwanis fund-raising support which provides free to Head Start families the quality children's books available through RIF. The Kiwanis headquarters office welcomes inquiries from Head Start programs on how to link up with local Kiwanis clubs. Copies of Kiwanis brochures are available describing how their clubs can support local Head Start and RIF programs.

IV. Literacy Organizations

■ American Library Association
Bell Atlantic ALA Family Literacy Project
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611
Telephone: (312) 944-6780

This project encourages libraries to develop and enhance library-based family literacy projects for the urban and rural poor and ethnic minorities. Because the concept of "family literacy" is new, this project has developed fact sheets addressing aspects of starting a family literacy project. The fact sheets include names, addresses, and phone numbers of contact persons. Single copies are free by calling 1-800-545-2433, extension 4296.

■ The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy
1002 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20007

This foundation's mission is to establish literacy as a value in American homes and to break intergenerational cycles of illiteracy. They have prepared a book *First Teachers* which is listed above and describes successful programs, contacts and additional sources of information about literacy.

■ International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, Delaware 19714-8139
Telephone: 302-731-1600

IRA provides a variety of publications with information about issues ranging from early childhood activities which nurture reading success to materials on adult illiteracy. Resources may be helpful in developing the family literacy approach.

■ Laubach Literacy Action
1320 Jamesville Avenue
Box 131
Syracuse, NY 13210
Telephone: (315) 422-9121

Laubach Literacy Action (LLA) is the largest network of private adult literacy programs providing instruction through trained volunteers. The organization publishes the Laubach Literacy Action Directory which lists Laubach Literacy programs across the country. In addition, LLA provides information on training, curriculum, and programming ideas for literacy projects. New Readers Press in the publishing division.

■ Literacy Volunteers of America
5795 Widewaters Parkway
Syracuse, NY 13214
Telephone: (315) 445-8000

Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) has more than two hundred affiliates working to teach adults to read and to train tutors. The organization publishes a directory of its affiliate programs across the United States. It is non- profit with over 350 programs training and supporting literacy tutor volunteers. It also provides curriculum materials and programming ideas for adult literacy projects and family literacy program ideas.

■ National Center for Family Literacy
401 South 4th Avenue, Suite 610
Louisville, KY 40202
Telephone: (502) 584-1133

This is a private non-profit organization established for the purpose of expanding efforts to solve the nation's literacy problems through family literacy programs. The National Center provides information, training, materials, and technical assistance to new and established family literacy programs. It is also affiliated with the Keenan Trust Family Literacy Project.

■ Reading Is Fundamental
600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20560
Telephone: (202) 287-3220

This is a national non-profit organization dedicated to bringing children and books together. Official RIF programs receive quality children's books at reduced prices and technical assistance materials and training on promoting family literacy. Contact RIF and request information on how to start a local program. To establish an official program, a project proposal must be designed, submitted, and approved by RIF.

■ SER Family Learning Centers (FLCs)
of SER-Jobs for Progress, Inc.
SER-Jobs for Progress National, Inc.
1355 River Bend Drive, Suite 240
Dallas, TX 75247
Telephone: (214) 631-3999

This learning center focuses on Hispanic literacy training for preschoolers, adolescents, welfare parents and senior citizens. The SER literacy campaign places special emphasis on the needs of Hispanics in the areas of education, training, employment, business and economic opportunities.

■ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Department of Education has four offices dedicated to fostering literacy:

1. Clearinghouse on Adult Education
Division of Adult Education
Mary E. Switzer Building
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202
Telephone: (202) 732-2412

The clearinghouse, maintained by the Division of Adult Education, offers free information on family literacy. Available publications include fact sheets, descriptions of family literacy programs, and bibliographies.

2. Even Start Program
Compensatory Education Programs
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 2043
Washington, DC 20202
Telephone: (202) 732-4682

The family-centered education projects funded under the Even Start Program are designed to help parents become partners in the education of their children and at the same time to provide literacy instruction to the parents. Local school districts in all States are eligible to apply for funds.

3. Family English Literacy Programs
   Office of Bilingual Education and
   Minority Language Affairs
   400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 5620
   Washington, DC 20202
   Telephone: (202) 732-5728

The program offers assistance to help adults with limited proficiency in English achieve competence in the English language, and provides instruction on how parents and family members can facilitate the educational achievement of their children. Organizations eligible for assistance are local school districts, colleges and universities, and private nonprofit groups. In 1988, there were thirty-five projects funded by this program.

4. Library Literacy Program
   Office of Library Programs
   555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Suite 400
   Washington, DC 20208

The Library Literacy Program makes grants to State and local public libraries to support literacy programs. In fiscal year 1988, 244 library literacy projects were funded and 5 percent (or eleven of these projects) provided family literacy activities. A variety of approaches to family literacy are represented in the library literacy projects linking libraries with parents and children in several States. State and local public libraries are eligible to apply for funds.

★ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1995 – 715 - 032 / 25042